

I'm So Busy – An American Mantra

Ask anyone you meet today how they are doing, and chances are, their response will be, "I'm so busy!" And frequently, clients, friends and family members share the struggles they encounter with their children's inability to FOCUS on tasks as they approach the middle school years. It's no real surprise — the pattern of trying to 'do it all' is usually introduced to children well before they need to make decisions about how to manage their time effectively. As our children's MODELS of self-management, we have provided a basis of over-scheduling and under-planning daily events and projects.

WHERE THE PROBLEM STARTS

Quite often, these children are, for the first time, encountering the formidable juggling of rigorous academic pressures, dealing with the diverse needs of several teachers as they change classes throughout the school day, sport practices, music lessons, and the social pressures of being a teenager. Unfortunately, making good DECISIONS about the effective use of their time isn't always easy for them, and their level of 'busyness' provides additional stress and pressure that prevent them from having the focus they need in order to be successful. Many times, this lack of self-management moves with them through adolescence and into ADULTHOOD, and wreaks havoc with their professional and family lives!

THE FAST TRACK

'Busyness' has not only become a way of life and a habit, but while we weren't looking it has become an ADDICTION. It has also become a way we MEASURE our self-worth as professionals, parents and functioning members in today's fast-paced society. Whether it be the volume of email we receive on a daily basis, the amount of crises in our typical workday, or the number of family activities we are responsible for managing (providing taxi service for our children, meal planning and grocery shopping), the list of responsibilities for most of us continues to grow daily.

A SKEWED PERSPECTIVE

In order to justify the whirlwind of daily life, we continually invent new CRITERIA to convince ourselves (and others) that we're accomplishing a lot, confusing the distinction between effectiveness, productivity and just staying busy. Most of us have built our schedules backwards, or upside down, as the case may be. As new activities present themselves at work, at home, or in our personal lives, we keep 'fitting! them in' an already overloaded schedule. Want to put an end to this incessant 'busyness?' Here are some fundamental guidelines to providing CLARITY for a more productive, effective life:

LIMITING YOUR SCOPE

Identify two PRIMARY goals for (each) your professional, personal and family life. Then list three projects you will need to complete in order to ACHIEVE each goal. For example, if getting a promotion is one of your primary goals in your professional life, you may need to develop a plan for projects that could include (a) working toward an advanced degree; (b) taking on additional assignments at work to promote your knowledge base of a new skill set; and (c) cultivating an internal network of individuals that will provide the clearest path toward your ideal position/job.

BREAKING IT DOWN

Identify the host of activities necessary to COMPLETE each of the projects you listed in the second guideline above. When scheduling activities, focus on those activities necessary to reach your goals, not simply 'filling' your schedule with low-payoff events. Take a look at how you're currently SPENDING your time — are you enjoying your life, your activities and the relationships you have engaged in? Are you involved in activities that keep you working toward your goals that feel you leaving happy and productive? Or are you just busy and burning yourself (and your family) out?

DEVELOP A ROUTINE

Organize your daily SCHEDULE. I mean this literally. View each 15 to 30 minute segment of your day as a container of sorts. It may be helpful to actually draw a DIAGRAM on a sheet of paper to provide a visual 'reality check' that demonstrates the limitations of the 24-hour container or schedule we all share. Map out those activities that are part of everyday life — self-care, dressing, eating breakfast, commuting, work schedules, lunch, banking, high-payoff family activities, leisure time — in those 15 to 30 minute increments throughout each day, and you'll quickly see how important it is to stay focused on keeping your schedule (and your life) in check.

MAINTAIN BOUNDARIES

This may feel odd at first, especially if you have had a difficult time saying 'no' in the past. Falling prey to TIME-WASTERS: over-scheduling or over-committing yourself; being afraid of delegating; trying to please others and accommodating their agendas; and the ringing telephone are just a few of the pitfalls you have had difficulty with in the past and that have cluttered your days. Developing and maintaining boundaries will take a bit of PRACTICE, but will yield dividends in terms of the time you'll recover to work on those high-payoff activities that will help you achieve your goals.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Being organized is more than just a physical state in one's office or home — it is really a way of LIVING that promotes a healthy and productive lifestyle to help you achieve what matters most in your professional, personal and family life. Engaging in activities that are based on your (or your family's) value system will ultimately provide a lifetime of personal SATISFACTION.

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